

A
LETTER

TO

DR. HOOKER,

DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL GARDENS AT KEW,
PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY;

FROM

DR. ACLAND,

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE IN OXFORD,
PRESIDENT OF THE MEDICAL COUNCIL.



1875.



Oxford, November 3, 1875.

DEAR DR. HOOKER,

The return of the October Term will probably bring before the University your opinion, (which I have not heard officially, but which meets me in society at every turn,) that *it is not desirable to perfect the long-intended design of placing our Botanical Collections and Gardens in proximity to the other Scientific Collections of the University.*

As this opinion seems to me to have been possibly given on an incomplete account of the reasons for the change, I venture to ask you to peruse the following statement, hoping that it may induce you to re-consider your conclusion, if it really be such as I hear.

Thirty years ago it appeared to some still living (for the greater number are gone) that the means for Scientific study and research in Oxford required complete reconstruction. The Geological, Anatomical, Zoological, Physical, and Chemical Collections and Apparatus were ill-placed in detached buildings. The Botanical Garden and the Scientific Library also were in separate parts of the town.

We decided to attempt the serious, because then unpopular, task of moving to a common Institution all that could be moved, and providing Laboratories and Lecture-rooms suitable for each department. All has gone well thus far. The University has purchased eighty acres of ground, on the fringe of which the Scientific Institute has been erected; there is room therefore, and to spare. The Cabinet of Physics moved thither is

developed into Professor Clifton's excellent Laboratories. The Chemical Department, planned by Sir Benjamin Brodie, has been constructed without stint, though already it needs extension to meet Professor Odling's wants. Buckland's Geology, arranged by Phillips in the court of the Museum, is, under the care of Prestwich, gaining new significance. The fossil Fauna can be readily compared with the extensive Anatomical Collections which, moved from Christ Church by the far-reaching liberality of the Dean and Governing Body, are becoming, under Rolleston's energetic treatment, of great value for reference in every department of Animal Biology. The Mineralogy has been re-arranged near the Mineralogical Laboratory by Professor Maskelyne, and a Lithological Laboratory is contemplated. All Hope's and Westwood's Invertebrates are moved from the Taylor Buildings. The Radcliffe Trustees, following the advice of Sidney Herbert and Mr. Gladstone, have transferred, for the common advantage, their large Scientific Library, and more than doubled their annual grant for Books. Even an Observatory has been instituted there under the direction of Mr. Pritchard, with the aid of Mr. De la Rue, as it were to crown the whole. One great Department only is missing. Though the fossil Flora is there, the modern Botany, its studies and its Teachers, remain aloof. I grieve to say, this separation, most injurious as it seems to me to the future interests of Biological Science in Oxford, is now said to be approved by you, and supported by your high authority.

There may seem little chance that I shall prevail against you in a contest on such a point. The matter will be decided by an open vote in our Convocation. Numbers, perhaps, are bound to side with you. But as this is a question on which my hopes in this direction during thirty years of labour in the University may be dashed at the eleventh hour, I will briefly state some of the reasons which guide my opinion.

1st, I believe that narrow and false views of Nature are promoted, by needlessly separating the study of its several departments, instead of aiming to apprehend its Unity.

It is true that sub-divisions become necessary, as well from the mere magnitude of Science, as from the mental conditions under which research must be carried on. It is therefore all the more desirable that there should be unity in the study of Science, and constant intercourse among her Students, where union and intercourse are possible. The Biological portion especially requires this. The links which bind Scientific Botany with the other portions of Biology, with Geology, with Physics, with Chemistry, with Experimental Agriculture, become more important every year. If proof were needed, Darwin's last book on Insectivorous Plants would give sufficient evidence. Many problems concerning the conditions necessary for digestion in animals will have to be re-considered in the presence of new facts. If I am not mistaken, the minute discrimination of true Species of plants will be more and more required in connection with the difficult Geological questions as to the position of

Strata. And, in short, if ever there was a time when Botanical Studies should not be kept aloof from the general body of allied Science, its Library, its Laboratories, it is the present time.

But, 2ndly, I am told that you have given to the Council of the University reasons against moving our Botanical Gardens to near the Museum which may be classed as two, 1st, that the University never can need more than three or four acres of ground for Botany; and, 2ndly, that it is undesirable from Æsthetic and Historical considerations to move the Gardens.

Now, I have never heard it complained that Kew Gardens are too large; or that the University of Edinburgh laments the possession of its splendid botanical grounds. The University has now, round her Scientific Institute, eighty acres of open ground, on which already a large assortment of shrubs is planted, and over which assuredly the Professor of Botany should exercise scientific control; and in which he might make in the course of time experiments of extreme importance both to Science and Agriculture, with the Professors of Physics, Chemistry, and Biology close to him. All this, moreover, would conduce greatly to the instruction and pleasure of the now numerous residents in the increasing suburban dwellings round Oxford.

Again, the Æsthetic and Historical reasons alleged against removal seem to me equally questionable. If the Botanical portion be moved, the gateway, the old walls, the trees, the Cherwell, all will remain. The Glass Houses only and the

formal plots would be gone. The site, its associations, its history, would be unharmed. Moreover, the present Gardens do not belong to the University : they are the freehold of Magdalen. If the University develope its Botanical department elsewhere, this spot would be still Magdalen College Garden, and would still remain a beautiful spectacle for all Oxford.

I had almost forgotten to remind you that the existing Glass Houses are rotten, and have to be speedily rebuilt : hence the need of a prompt decision. Rebuild these far away from the Museum and the Parks, and you have needlessly separated Botany in Oxford from the other Sciences, and the Botanical Professor and his Students from their colleagues, and from all their appliances, for generations to come. Rebuild them, with a new House and Work Rooms for the Professor, in the Parks, and you finish the work we have been engaged on for thirty years, and have in the future a noble prospect for the development of a complete national Education in Science, long after most of us, though not you, are forgotten.

I should have been disposed to appeal to your generosity, as an old friend, not to give your verdict, except from the strongest scientific reasons, against the promoters of scientific progress here. But I cannot learn that you have based your opinion on the scientific merits, and I prefer to rest my appeal on much firmer ground than personal kindness. The formation of the Royal Society was promoted in Oxford more than two centuries ago, to advance simultaneously every Branch of Human Know-

ledge. Fortune planted it in London; and you have become its illustrious President. In these two centuries Oxford fell behind London in all Physical research, to the great injury of the highest National Education. A few years since a determined band of your own Fellows resolved to enable the University to regain its ancient opportunities for scientific work. I have laboured in one humble field, that of making machinery for the next generation. If you can re-consider your opinion, and advise the University, on reviewing the whole case, to perfect our arrangements for the future complete study of Nature in its Unity, depend on it future generations of Students will bless you: and those who have striven all their lives for this end,—an end, observe, whose fruit will mainly be for others when they are gone,—may yet witness the success of their labours in thankfulness and peace.

I have only to beg you to excuse the earnestness of my appeal, and to forgive me if I am obliged to rely on hearsay information and not on an official knowledge of your opinion. But hearsay information may decide the votes.

I am, dear Dr. Hooker,

Faithfully yours,

HENRY W. ACLAND.

To J. D. Hooker, Esq., M.D., D.C.L.

Director of the Royal Gardens, Kew, and President of the Royal Society.